



Autumn 2005

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Habichat



For Stewards of Maryland's Backyard Wildlife



Native Plant Profile

**Maryland Wildlife:
Eastern Chipmunk**

Platform Feeders for the Birds

Project FeederWatch

HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property.

Write to Me! Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941
E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

Native Plant Profile.....Wild Grape (*Vitis spp.*)

Common Species In Maryland	
Fox grape	(<i>Vitis labrusca</i>)
Summer grape	(<i>Vitis aestivalis</i>)
River Bank grape	(<i>Vitis riparis</i>)

Grapes are a favorite, if not THE favorite food of over 100 songbirds and many mammals.



Description: A woody vine, climbing to varying heights. It can reach 30' in some wooded sites if not pruned. Stems are dark, thornless and can be hairy. Bark is brownish gray and may shred. Tendrils on stems curl around other plants to support the vine. Leaves are toothed, heart-shaped and often can be lobed, 2"- 9" in size.

Flowers: They are small and green, blooming May through July

Fruit: Small to large purple to black spheres, hanging in clusters 1/8" to 1" in size. Grapes ripen from July to October. Each fruit contains 2 to 6 seeds, which are eaten and spread by wildlife. Wild grape yields can vary greatly from year to year.

Habitat: Stream banks, pond edge, roadsides, thickets, and woods. The woody vine can be very large in the wild and often grows up with the tree it climbs on for support. They need sunlight and will reach to get it, sometimes covering up and shading out plants over which they climb. Grape vines prefer moist, fertile soils.



Food for wildlife: Grapes are a favorite, if not THE favorite food of over 100 songbirds and many mammals. Even the old dried clusters are sought by wildlife in the winter. Those in Maryland are: Mourning Dove, Ruffed Grouse, Quail and Wild Turkey. Songbirds include Eastern Bluebird, Cardinal, Catbird, Junco (Especially dried clusters), Mockingbird, Robin, Fox Sparrow, Cedar Waxwing, and Woodpeckers. Mammals that eat the fruit are Black Bear, Coyote, Gray and Red fox, Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk, Fox and Gray Squirrel. White-tailed deer eat the fruit, foliage and stems.

Cover: The dense foliage provides good escape cover and nesting cover for songbirds. Its thin, peeling bark is often used in nest building by songbirds especially cardinals and catbirds, also squirrels.

Additional Notes:

- Humans use wild grapes in jelly and wines and the edible leaves are used to wrap meat and rice mixtures.
- The root stock of four North American wild grapes helped save the European wine industry from a plague that almost wiped out their native stock in the 1800s.
- Half of the grapes in the world are native to the United States.
- Wild grapes are vigorous plants with few serious pests except for the Japanese beetle, which destroys the leaves.
- Grapes are easily trained on fences or arbors, creating excellent screens.
- For the best fruit production, grapes need heavy annual pruning in winter before sap runs.
- Where desirable, encourage growth on small trees and shrubs for songbird nest sites.

If you choose not to have wild grapes in your wildlife plantings, cultivated grapes are just as acceptable to wildlife. Some of the best domestic grapes to grow in Maryland include the varieties Concord, Candice, Reliance, Vanessa and Himrod.

Maryland Wildlife: Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias Striatus*)

Whether they are stuffing their cheeks with birdseed or carrying a strawberry bigger than their head, chipmunks have a knack for raiding our gardens and entertaining us as they are doing it. The following information gives a glimpse into the lives of these ground squirrels.



Size: 8 ½ " – 10 ¼ " in length Weight 3 oz. to 4 ½ oz.

Food: Seeds, nuts, acorns, berries, corn, bulbs, insects, small amphibians and bird eggs.

Habitat: Deciduous woodlands, forest edges, brushy forests

Space Needs: Mainly solitary. Home range for males is 1 acre, ½ acre for females May have 2 to 30 chipmunks per acre depending on food supply.

Den: Excavates up to 12 ft. tunnels to nest, sleeping chamber and food caches.

Lifespan: 1 to 2 years

Status in Maryland: Common west of the Chesapeake Bay. Uncommon on the Eastern Shore.

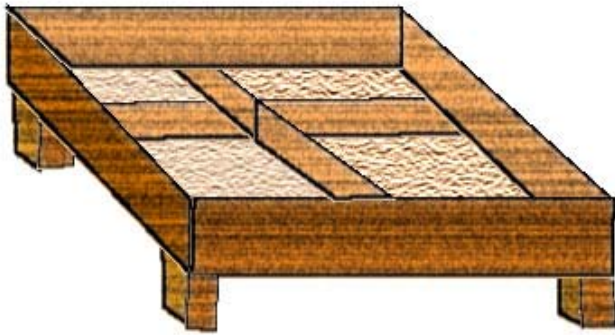
Natural History: Mates late February to April and late June to early July producing two litters per year. Gestation 31-32 days, 4-5 young per litter. Emerge from dens 5-7 weeks. Adult size by 3 months. Mother drives young off; dispersal is accompanied by vocalizations of adults. Calls let youngsters know how far to disperse. Sexually mature after first winter.

Chipmunk Vocals: Bird-like chip calls are single or repeated 80 - 180 per minute. Signals its presence. Chucks are lower pitched and signals caution, fear or annoyance. Chip-trill is rapidly repeated chips when animals are startled. Chuck trill given when chipmunks are fighting. Whistles during mating.

Backyard Habitat: Provide forests, fencerows, thickets, stonewall, woodpiles, and a source of water. Plant oaks, hickories, beeches, serviceberries, strawberries, raspberries and dogwoods.

Additional Notes: Chipmunks create scatter hoards, which are food caches located aboveground. Chipmunks steal food from each other so much that biologists think scatter hoards are built solely to restock raided coffers.

Platform Feeders for the Birds



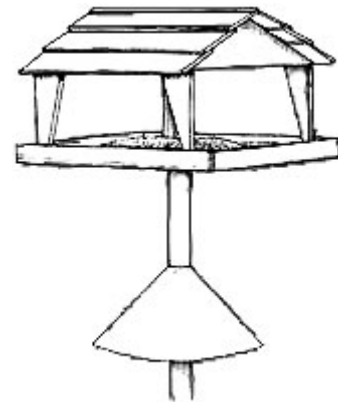
The feeder should have a screen; wire mesh is the best to allow moisture to drain away.

There are a few disadvantages to note about this type of feeder that need to be mentioned. They can lose their seed in high winds or snow. Squirrels or large birds such as crows or blue jays can dominate this type of feeder.

You must keep this feeder properly cleaned to keep it from being a health hazard to the birds. See our Habichat article ["Keep Those Bird Feeders Clean"](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/habichat2.html#bf) at www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/habichat2.html#bf for suggestions.

Platform feeders, also known as tray feeders are similar to a bird's natural feeding habitat. They will attract those birds that do not use tube feeders. It is a good way to bring Cardinals into your bird viewing area as they love platforms because they allow them to see where they are and what type of seed is there, unlike other styles of feeders.

Platform or tray feeders are easy to clean and maintain. They can be on the ground as a tray with a meshed screen with legs. Or they can be hanging from a tree limb, or attached to a pole. You may wish to put a roof on the platform to protect the seed from rain and snow. It has only been recently that commercial platform feeders have been marketed to the public. Why? Maybe because this type of feeder is so easy to construct. You can stick a large flat object, although a screen is best, on a birdbath pedestal or stump and you have a feeder.



Besides Cardinals other birds that enjoy platform feeders are ground feeding birds such as Mourning Doves, Juncos, Chipping Sparrows, Robins, Towhees, Song sparrows and various species of grosbeaks. You shouldn't place your platform feeders too close to shrubbery where cats can hide. Fenced-in yards are best.

Platform feeders, also known as tray feeders, are similar to a bird's natural feeding habitat.

Project FeederWatch - Check It Out!

An annual survey of birds that visit feeders in winter

Filling up bird feeders is a labor of love for many backyard enthusiasts. The fun comes in watching who comes to feed through a favorite window. Where else can you get a front row seat for a live show from the comfort of your own home?

It can be exciting to witness the flurry of birds coming to the feeders. It can be chickadees, cardinals, sparrows, goldfinches, woodpeckers, nuthatches and wrens. Maybe it is an unusual bird, one that you have not seen before, and one that sends you running for the field guide.

These sightings may make you wonder why these birds are here in the fall and winter. A common concern is that by feeding, you are preventing them from migrating. The cues for bird migration occur in the fall when natural food is most plentiful. Migration in birds is a genetically programmed hormonal response to changes in day length. So keep on filling those feeders! In many cases if you get an unusual bird to visit the feeder is that the creature is simply off course.



Project Feeder Watch is a program you can participate in by recording the numbers and kinds of birds that visit your feeder. This project started in Ontario, Canada in the 1970's and came to the U.S. in 1987 to be run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The first year in the U.S. had 4,000 participants and by 2005 over 15,000 are sending in reports from all 50 states.

Filling up bird feeders is a labor of love for many backyard enthusiasts. This study helps biologists answer questions such as how disease is spread among back yard birds visiting feeders, food and environmental factors and expansion or contraction of ranges of feeder visitors. Results of these findings are published in scientific magazines and recognized national magazines such as Birdwatcher Digest and newspaper articles.

If this sounds like something you would like to be a part of, it's easy to sign up. Call Project FeederWatch Toll Free at 1-800-843-2473 or join via the Internet at www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

It is a wonderful way to help scientists learn more about birds and have a good time doing it!

Acknowledgements:

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- Photograph of River Bank grape (*Vitis riparia* Michx.) courtesy of University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point and Paul E. Berry.
- Photograph of chipmunk courtesy of Wildlife Conflicts Information Hotline Online Site, USDA/APHIS Wildlife Services & Purdue University.
- Illustration of chipmunk courtesy of Edith Thompson.
- Photograph of Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* courtesy of Gene Oleynik, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.
- Photograph of Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) courtesy of Gene Oleynik, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres.

DNR Online... Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

Maryland's **"Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program"** - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org



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